The American Sabbath Union and Human Rights



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In Dr. Herrick Johnson's address before the American Sabbath Union, on the Sunday newspaper, as published in the March *Monthly Document* of that association, there are four propositions laid down concerning the Sunday newspaper, the last of which we shall give special notice. Quoting from an Illinois Supreme Court Report, he says:-*ASUHR 2.1*

"Every individual has the right to the enjoyment of the Christian Sabbath without liability to annoyance from the ordinary secular pursuits of life, except so far as they may be dictated by necessity or charity."*ASUHR 2.2*

This proposition is self-evident, and needs no discussion. But there are some questions that we would like to ask, to find out the idea of the Sunday-law advocates upon the subject of human rights. Suppose a man does not wish to exercise his right to rest on the first day of the week; what then? Must he be forced to exercise it? Will he be compelled to rest, whether he wishes to or not? If he is to be, then it is demonstrated that the law does not contemplate the protection of Sunday observance as a man's *right*, but the enforcement of it as a *duty*. Governments are organized for the *protection* of people's rights, not for the purpose of *compelling* them to exercise their rights, for it is considered self-evident, as a law of nature, that no man will need to be compelled to assert his own rights.*ASUHR 2.3*

Another point that should not be passed lightly by is this: How extensive an idea of human right have these Sunday-law advocates? Do they mean to imply that every man has a right to the enjoyment of a Sabbath rest whenever he chooses to take it, and on whatever day he chooses to rest? or do they mean to limit that right to a certain day? Do they mean that every man has a right to be protected in the enjoyment of rest only on Sunday? This latter is inferred from the proposition, which plainly implies that a person has no right to the undisturbed enjoyment of rest on any other day. If they say that a man has a right to the undisturbed enjoyment of rest on the seventh day of the week, then they deprive themselves of all argument for a Sunday law; and if they say that a man has not a right to rest upon Saturday, they thereby confess that their proposed law is a law against the rights of conscience; for it is well

known that those people do conscientiously rest upon the seventh day.*ASUHR 3.1*

That their movement for a national Sunday law is a movement to the effect that no one has any rights except those who keep Sunday, is evident from the following. It has been quoted many times before, it doubtless will be quoted many times again, unless National Reform Sunday-law advocates specifically repudiate it. It is from Dr. Edwards' speech at the New York National Reform Convention. He says:-*ASUHR 3.2*

"What are the rights of the atheist? I would tolerate him as I would a poor lunatic, for in my view he is scarcely sound. So long as he does not rave, so long as he is not dangerous, I would tolerate him. I would tolerate him as I would a conspirator."*ASUHR 4.1*

And later he exclaims, "Tolerate atheism, sir? there is nothing out of hell that I would not tolerate as soon."*ASUHR 4.2*

And what is Dr. Edwards' idea of an atheist? Following is his own statement, in the save lecture:-*ASUHR 4.3*

"The atheist is a man who denies the being of a God and a future life. To him mind and matter are the same, and time is the be-all and the end-all of consciousness and of character.*ASUHR 4.4*

"The deist admits God, but denies that he has any such personal control over human affairs as we call providence, or that he manifests himself and his will in a revelation.*ASUHR 4.5*

"The Jew admits God, providence, and revelation, but rejects the entire scheme of gospel redemption by Jesus Christ as sheer imagination, or-worse-sheer imposture.*ASUHR 4.6*

"The seventh-day Baptists believe in God and Christianity, and are conjoined with the other members of this class by the accident of differing with the mass of Christians upon the question of what precise day of the week shall be observed as holy.*ASUHR 4.7*

"These all are, for the occasion, and so far as our amendment is concerned, one class. They use the same arguments and the same

tactics against us. They must be counted together, which we very much regret, but which we cannot help. The first-named is the leader in the discontent and in the outcry,-the atheist, to whom nothing is higher or more sacred than man, and nothing survives the tomb. It is his class. Its labors are almost wholly in his interest; its success would be almost wholly his triumph. The rest are adjuncts to him in this contest. They must be named from him; they must be treated as, for this question, one party."*ASUHR 4.8*

That is, the man who differs with the majority as to the exact day to be observed, the man who conscientiously observes the seventh day, because the Bible says so, instead of the first, concerning which the Bible says nothing, is classed as an atheist; and it is plainly declared that an atheist is not to be tolerated, except as a lunatic would be tolerated. A lunatic is allowed to run at large so long as he is quiet; but as soon as his mania takes an aggressive form, he is shut up. Dr. Edwards regards the keeping of the seventh day as evidence of an unsound mind. So long as the individual should say nothing about it, he might perhaps be considered a harmless lunatic; but whenever the observer of the seventh day should begin to promulgate his faith, and openly teach others that the seventh day is the Sabbath, and persuade them to accept it, he would be raving, and, therefore, would be shut up and treated as a conspirator.*ASUHR 5.1*

In the *Christian Statesman* of July 7, 1887, it is positively denied that atheists, among whom it will be remembered Christians who keep the seventh day are classed, have "any reasonable claim to conscientious convictions, and privileges at all." Thus it is plainly seen that the success of this National Sunday-law movement means the depriving of a large number of the citizens of the United States of the rights of conscience.*ASUHR 5.2*

Let it be understood that whatever right any man has is bestowed upon him by God himself. Human rights are not bestowed by civil government. All that civil governments are instituted for is to protect men in the enjoyment of rights which God has given them. The Declaration of Independence, which has justly been called the charter of American liberties, declares that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable

rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This means that every individual is equal, with respect to the rights with which God has endowed him. Now, while we have heard National Reformers and the president of the American Sabbath Union rail against the Constitution, we have never yet heard an American, or any other person, for that matter, find fault with the Declaration of Independence. That document voiced a truth as sure as any statement of Holy Writ. God has given to every man the same right; if ninety-nine per cent. of the people in any country have a certain right, the other one per cent. have the same right. But the American Sabbath Union is organized for the express purpose of protecting one class in the enjoyment of certain rights, and the depriving of another class of the same rights. In other words, it is organized for the express purpose of overthrowing the work done by the founders of this government. It is distinctively un-American. Nothing is surer than that its work is the exact opposite of the work of the immortal framers of the Declaration of Independence; and therefore since their work was to secure to this land perfect liberty, its work has for its sole object the overthrow of American liberty. It seems as though this demonstration must be clear to every individual.*ASUHR 6.1*

It will be said that those who are thus discriminated against and deprived of equal rights with others are only a few. Thus Dr. Edwards, in the same speech from which we have quoted, said:-*ASUHR 7.1*

“The parties whose conscience we are thus charged with troubling, taken altogether, are but few in number. This determines nothing as to who is right, but the fact remains, and is worthy of note, that, taken altogether, they amount to but a small fraction of our citizenship. They are not even as many as those among us who do not speak the English language.”*ASUHR 7.2*

Rev. W. F. Crafts, in his speech before the Senate Committee, spoke of “the one or two small sects of Christians who worship on Saturday.” And after speaking of the difficulties that rise in exempting them from the penalties of the Sunday law, contemptuously dismisses them in the following words:-*ASUHR 7.3*

“Infinitely less harm is done by the usual policy, the only constitutional or sensible one, to let the insignificantly small minority of less than one in a hundred, whose religious convictions require them to rest on Saturday (unless their work is of a private character such as the law allows them to do on Sunday), suffer the loss of one day’s wages rather than have the other ninety-nine suffer by the wrecking of the Sabbath by public business.”*ASUHR 7.4*

Many times have we heard Sunday-law lecturers pass the consideration of the fact that their law would cause seventh-day observers to suffer, with the statement that such people constitute only about seven-tenths of one per cent. of the population, and that therefore they were too insignificant to be noticed. Perhaps they may think so; but such expressions show that they do not understand what they are doing. It is not a question of whether a few people who observe Saturday will be injured or not, but whether the government can afford to adopt the principle that minorities have no rights. If that principle is adopted, it will not be limited in its application to observers of the seventh day. It may seem very fine for the majority on any question of opinion to decide that those who differ with them have no rights; but they should remember that majorities sometimes change. This question of Sunday law will determine whether a man’s life or property is safe in this country. If the government lends itself to a scheme which will be unjust to a single individual, then nobody has any assurance that injustice will not be done him. If the rights of a few people may be trampled upon because they keep the seventh day, the rights of some other people may be trampled upon because they differ with the majority on some other question. If in this country the principle of trampling upon human rights is once adopted, nobody can tell where it will stop. We are not alarmists, but we have no hesitation in saying that if the government follows the course marked out for it by the American Sabbath Union, the scenes of the French Revolution will be re-enacted in this country. It cannot be otherwise.*ASUHR 7.5*

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